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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: August 16, 2007

Berger Supports Sex Offender Database

11. Minister for Justice Maria Berger of the SPOe has spoken out in support of Interior Minister Guenther Platter's (OeVP) proposal to set up a database listing known sex offenders in Austria. According to Austrian media, the database is to be launched in 2008. It is not clear at this point, however, whether offenders will also be listed in the Austrian central registration office's files, as Platter has suggested.

Like all major Austrian media, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten says that on the issue of a database listing sex offenders, the "coalition is in agreement." Justice Minister Maria Berger from the SPOe, supporting a proposal to that effect by her OeVP colleague, Interior Minister Guenther platter, suggested that sex offenders who have been released from custody will thus have remain under observation.

Meanwhile, in an interview with liberal daily Der Standard, the Justice Minister suggested introducing a "marriage-like contract" for same sex partnerships. She has a "pragmatic approach" to the question of why homosexuals are unlikely to obtain the right to marry in the near future in Austria: "There is no way this could be pushed through. That is why I believe that -- rather than ending up at a dead end with your initial idea -- it is better to try a somewhat different approach, i.e. creating the opportunity for a marriage-like union for same sex partnerships."

European Forum Alpbach

12. The European Forum Alpbach, which has been held in the Tyrolean village of Alpbach every year since 1945, begins today. For almost three weeks, speakers and participants from all over the world, including experts and students in the sciences, economics and politics, will discuss current issues and formulate interdisciplinary solutions. Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer will open this year's Forum, which is to focus on the topic of "Emergence and Innovation."

Reporting on this year's European forum Alpbach, which will be opened by Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer in Tyrol province today, ORF online news notes that the "almost 500 speakers and 2,800 attendees will once again turn the village of Alpbach into a center for political, economic and scientific discussion." Among the prominent guests at the forum are Czech President Vaclav Klaus and his Foreign Minister Karl Schwarzenberg, the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Poettering and EU Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, as well as several Austrian cabinet ministers. The so-called reform talks will focus on "emerging markets and emerging partners," and political discussions will look into the "power

factor resources."

Interview with Erhard Busek

13. A leading Austrian daily publishes an interview with Erhard Busek, the President of the European Forum Alpbach, and chairman of the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM), as well as special coordinator of the European Union's Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe on the issues expected to top the agenda at this year's meetings in Alpbach.

The significance of this year's topic, "Emergence and Innovation," at the European Forum Alpbach is that in "every discipline from science and technology to politics, there are new developments and I think we have to create the instruments to cope with them. We have to be aware of what is new because there is a certain tendency to refuse what is new, so there's a certain need for a reality check," Erhard Busek said in an interview with semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung on the sidelines of the Alpbach Forum. The European Forum will also consider "developments occurring without the deliberate assistance of man," including climate change: "Even if there are reasons for why humankind is responsible for climate change, I think we were certainly not prepared for it," according to Busek. There will be a number of meetings on climate change, "because it's of overall concern. On the other hand, we are also looking forward to discussing sustainability which I think is connected with this question, because for the moment we are not really able to manage these problems." Politically, talks will focus on the "new power centers:" Traditionally, "we considered the East and the West as the centers of power. The United States was the center of power for a while, with the European Union as one, too. But the reality is that really China and India, and maybe Brazil, are the emerging powers, and emerging markets. They are becoming the new wave of power, so I think that it is quite necessary to engage with them."

Deadly Attack in Iraq

14. All Austrian media report that at least 250 people died in Tuesday's bombings in the north of Iraq - the deadliest attack on a single area since 2003. Quoting estimates from local Iraqi officials who expect the number of victims to rise sharply, Austrian media say the actual death toll might be closer to 500. Four bombs devastated two villages of the Yazidi, a Kurdish religious sect, near the city of Mosul, and left at least 350 people injured. The US military is blaming al-Qaeda for the bombs, and acknowledged that tackling insurgent attacks was a difficult task. One Austrian daily warns that ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq, caught up in the power struggle between radical nationalists and extremist Islamists, are threatened to be destroyed completely.

Reporting like all Austrian media on the most recent attacks in Iraq, liberal daily Der Standard publishes an analysis of current development in the country by foreign editor and Middle East expert Gudrun Harrer. The expert argues that the very existence of minorities in Iraq is threatened: The smaller ethnic and religious groups in Iraq are being persecuted by the extremists, and are in danger of being crushed in the fighting between Arab and Kurdish nationalist forces. A referendum will be held this year to decide on an Iraqi region's Kurdish or Arab affiliation, but traditionally this is the area where most of the small ethnic and religious groups have lived for generations, primarily in rather isolated and well-defined settlements. It is in these areas, where the tensions and the violence are mounting continuously, Harrer says. Meanwhile, in centrist daily die Presse, foreign affairs writer Thomas Seifert, pointing to the attack on the Yazidi minority, which may have left up to 500 people dead, asks whether the US troops surge has been ineffective. According to Seifert, Wahabite al-Qaeda extremists in particular consider the members of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq as "devil worshippers." The troop surge, Seifert quotes political analyst Joost Hiltermann from the International Crisis Group, "may have made Baghdad more secure. But it has failed to banish terrorism from Iraq." The terrorists have merely "redirected their attacks to hit the less protected provincial areas and peripheral regions," he argues.

US to Blacklist Iran's Revolutionary Guard

15. The US is preparing to designate Iran's Revolutionary Guards

force as a foreign terrorist unit -- a classification that would allow the US to target the Force's finances. If confirmed, this will be the first time official armed units of a sovereign state are included on the list of banned terrorist groups. Washington has repeatedly accused Iran of destabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan, blaming the Revolutionary Guards for supplying and training insurgents. Meanwhile, in the conflict over Tehran's nuclear ambitions, a spokesperson for President George Bush said that the US is not considering military action against Iran, but continues to

bank on a UN Security Council solution, reported ORF TV's prime time news Zeit im Bild I on Wednesday.

Chavez Outlines Planned Changes

16. Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez has announced plans to change the country's constitution to allow him to stand for office indefinitely. Current rules limiting presidential terms mean President Chavez would have to step down when his term ends in 2012. The measures would also increase presidential control over Venezuela's municipalities and states. He presented his plans in a speech to the National Assembly, which is expected to approve them within several months. According to ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal.
Kilner